New skills agenda for Europe

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The European Parliament adopted by 391 votes to 80 with 31 abstentions, a resolution on new skills agenda for Europe.

Members welcomed the Commission communication and acknowledged that the EU needs a paradigm shift in the goals and functioning of the education sector in line with the fast changing economic, technological and societal environment.

Developing skills for life and skills for employment: although the main focus of the skills package is the immediate needs of the labour market, Members recommended working in close collaboration with the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) in order to anticipate skills needs and to develop a pan European skills needs forecasting tool and lifelong learning.

Parliament advocated a holistic approach to education and skills development, inviting Member States to:

- not only focus on employability skills, but also skills that are useful to society (managerial skills, social and intercultural skills, management, volunteering, foreign language proficiency and negotiation) in their education and training programmes, while promoting European craftsmanship;
- go beyond promoting the 'right occupational skills' and to also focus on those aspects of education that are more practical, and that foster an entrepreneurial mind-set, innovativeness and creativity, support people to think critically, understand the concept of sustainability, while respecting fundamental rights and values and participate in the democratic process and social life.

Members wanted to see a more comprehensive approach to the up-skilling of migrants, including through social entrepreneurship, civic education and informal learning.

Role of education in the fight against unemployment, social exclusion and poverty: Members are concerned that between 2010 and 2014 investment in education and training fell by 2.5 % across the Union. Public education systems should be adequately resourced so that education can fulfil its role in the fight against unemployment, social exclusion and poverty. Access to learning and training opportunities should be a universal right at every stage of life.

Furthermore, the prospect of the new skills strategy in relation to the early stages of education is not sufficiently forward-looking. Parliament therefore called on Member States to invest in early childhood education and care (ECEC) in order to increase quality and adopt measures to reduce early school leaving. It insisted that relevant programmes must be available to give all young people who have dropped out of primary or secondary school a second chance. People with disabilities also have special requirements, and thus need appropriate support in order to acquire skills.

Boosting lifelong learning opportunities: concerned about the situation of 70 million Europeans lacking basic skills, Members welcomed the introduction of the initiative Upskilling Pathways which should involve the individualised assessment of learning needs, a quality learning offer and systematic validation of the skills and competences acquired, enabling their easy recognition on the labour market.

Strengthen the link between education and employment: Members encouraged Member States to promote professional learning in accordance with economic demands, and together with the social partners to develop and put in place policies that provide for educational and training leave, as well as in-work training. They stressed the huge innovation and employment potential of renewable energy sources and the search for greater resource and energy efficiency.

The key role of non-formal and informal learning: Parliament stressed the importance of validating non-formal and informal learning, particularly in the case of vulnerable or disadvantaged people such as refugees or low-skilled workers who need priority access to validation agreements.

Parliament underlined the need to work on overcoming the lack of awareness on validation among all relevant stakeholders and make further efforts in establishing relevant legal frameworks in order to enable validation.

Fostering digital, science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics (STEAM) and entrepreneurial skills: Parliament welcomed the Commissions proposal to urge Member States to draw up comprehensive national strategies for digital skills with special attention being paid to closing the digital divide, in particular for older persons; points out however that in order for these strategies to be effective, there is a need to ensure lifelong learning opportunities for educational staff.

Members considered that greater importance should be given to STEM education to improve digital learning and teaching. They also highlight the need to include elements of entrepreneurial learning, including social entrepreneurship, at all levels of education.

Modernising education and vocational training (VET) and enhancing work-based training: the report called on the Commission and Member States to change the image of VET, with adequate investment, to guarantee that it is more relevant to employers and the labour market and to consider VET as a valid educational and vocational pathway.

Members recommended encouraging cooperation between secondary schools and businesses, especially through internships. They also highlighted the need to invest and support the initial and continuing professional development of teachers in all sectors of education.

Funding: Parliament regretted the lack of dedicated funding for the implementation of the proposals. Member States should be encouraged to take full advantage of the existing sources of funding that are available to support the implementation of the Agenda, especially the European Social Fund.

Lastly, Parliament called for the announcement of a European Year of Adult Learning, which will help to raise awareness of the value of adult education and active ageing across Europe.